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24 April 1975

DCI BRIEFING FOR
24 APRIL NSC MEETINGTHE SITUATION IN VIETNAM

I. Mr. President, despite the reduction in heavy fighting during the past few days, the fate of the Republic of Vietnam is sealed, and Saigon faces imminent military collapse. The timing is in the hands of the North Vietnamese, who now hold an overwhelming military advantage over the government.

A. In recent weeks, the Communists have moved at least six divisions into Military Region 3 from farther north. They now have at least 13 divisions in MR 3, together with large numbers of artillery, armor, and air defense units. Two or three other divisions are approaching the region.

1. The rapid buildup has caused some localized supply difficulties for the North Vietnamese, but they have stockpiles sufficient to overcome these problems.

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2. / In the meantime, the Communists have been preparing and positioning their forces for a final assault on Saigon's defenses.
- B. The government, by comparison, has only five divisions defending the approaches to the capital, and four others which are being rebuilt, but are still seriously understrength.
 1. Moreover, almost all of the government units have seen heavy action, and are battle weary.
- C. While the respite has given the government time to realign some of its forces, there is little evidence of any basic strengthening of the defenses close to Saigon.
 1. Recent reporting indicates many middle and senior grade officers are ignoring their military duties and trying to arrange the evacuation of themselves and their families.
 2. Several reports cite senior officials as saying the situation is hopeless, and this mentality probably will lead to a rapid unraveling once a major North Vietnamese push begins.

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II. The most recent combat developments are as follows:

A. East of Saigon, the North Vietnamese 325th Division, which captured Ham Tan two days ago, has now moved down the coast and is fast approaching Vung Tau. A second Communist division -- the 6th -- may be converging on the town from the north.

1. Vung Tau could fall to the Communists in the next day or two, eliminating a major evacuation route.

B. West and southwest of the capital, North Vietnamese forces today stepped up their attacks along Routes 1 and 4 in Hau Nghia and Long An Provinces.

1. GVN military headquarters has now designated this area as a new "battle front."

C. Tay Ninh City in the northwest is isolated and now is defended only by rangers and territorial forces.

D. In Saigon, at Tan Son Nhut airport,

an unruly crowd of 400 to 500 Vietnamese civilians appeared at the main airport entrance

today, and attempted to enter the base. GVN security forces were being reinforced and should be able to maintain control.

1. This is the first indication of civil disorder at the airport.
- E. The Communists may now have anti-aircraft artillery units within range of the approaches to the airport. If they use these weapons for offensive rather than defensive purposes, they could make flying into and out of the airport extremely dangerous.
 1. The Communists also possess long range artillery, such as 122-mm and 130-mm field guns, which could hit Tan Son Nhut from as much as 17 miles away. North Vietnamese forces are already within that range on the west and southwest.
- III. On the political front, the Communists this week quashed any lingering hopes of a genuine compromise, or a quick cease-fire, which would provide the best circumstances for an orderly evacuation of Americans and those South Vietnamese most vulnerable to Communist reprisal.

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- A. Hanoi and the PRG dismissed President Thieu's resignation, and Saigon's call for unconditional negotiations, as a "clumsy and deceptive trick" designed by the US to forestall Saigon's inevitable collapse.
- B. They are demanding that the entire South Vietnamese government be replaced by persons not associated with the previous Thieu regime.
- C. The Communists are now focusing their harshest attacks on the US, demanding a total withdrawal of the US presence in Vietnam and support for Saigon. In essence their message is running along these lines:
 - 1. The American withdrawal should occur immediately. An authoritative North Vietnamese commentary two days ago stated that all Americans could be evacuated "in a very short time, even in one day, without any difficulty or obstacle."
 - 2. At the same time, Hanoi is extremely sensitive to prospects of a large scale South Vietnamese evacuation, and is condemning US expressions of concern about Communist

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reprisals in the South. Hanoi appears to be warning that the Communists will not agree to, and even will interfere with, any US effort to conduct a large-scale exodus of South Vietnamese.

D. It is impossible to estimate the magnitude of the process of execution and reprisal now underway in the areas of South Vietnam under Communist control. Eyewitness accounts in some areas suggest a pattern of locally initiated executions of leading police and government officials. Wholesale evacuation of these people at the very last moment is clearly not feasible -- especially in view of Hanoi's warnings. Time may be running out for a more measured and less visible evacuation effort of those most vulnerable to exemplary reprisal.

IV. The Communists are not promising meaningful negotiations -- even in exchange for a totally new South Vietnamese government and full American withdrawal -- but only "the rapid settlement of the affairs of South Vietnam." At this point the best a new government could probably obtain would

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be a negotiated surrender under the guise of a "political solution."

- A. After two days of political confusion and bickering in Saigon, we may be near the formation of a government with some chance of dealing with the Communists on this basis.
 1. Prime Minister Can and his entire cabinet resigned today and negotiations are now underway between General "Big" Minh and President Huong on the matter of organizing a new government.
 - a. Minh has turned down an initial offer of the prime ministership, and is holding out for the presidency and "full powers." (Such a transfer of power would, of course, be an extra-constitutional solution.)
 2. "Big" Minh is the major political figure probably most acceptable to the Communists as a negotiating partner.
 - a. If he gets his new government organized in the next few days, he will then attempt to seek and accept whatever terms the Communists offer.

3. The GVN ministry of information this morning ordered the removal of all anti-Communist banners, posters, and slogans in Saigon.
4. As I indicated above, however, there is a good chance that the North Vietnamese military timetable will allow very little additional time for the political process in Saigon to produce a government with which the Communists might deal.
5. If the Communist military advance resumes in earnest in the next few days, a collapse of South Vietnamese will and GVN authority could make this kind of orderly transfer of power impossible.

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BACKUP FOR
24 APRIL NSC MEETING

CAMBODIA

- I. In Cambodia, the Communists are proceeding with their occupation of Phnom Penh and other urban centers behind a curtain of silence.
 - A. Initial statements by deputy prime minister Khieu Samphan and information minister Hu Nimm called for national unity to help build an independent, nonaligned, and prosperous Cambodia, but the two leaders avoided any specific details on plans or policies.
 1. [redacted] the [redacted] Communists are moving ruthlessly against former government officials and military officers on a country-wide basis.
 2. So far there has been no evidence of mass reprisals against the civilian population, but reports that the urban population is being segregated according to class probably portends at least a period of indoctrination for many.

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3. Large numbers of civilians have also been evacuated from Phnom Penh and from some provincial centers, both to facilitate the administration of the cities and to ease the strain on food supplies.
4. There is no firm evidence on the fate of senior figures in the former government, but most westerners in the capital have taken refuge in the French embassy compound.

[Redacted]

- B. Prince Sihanouk is still showing no signs of preparing to leave Peking. Members of his entourage, in fact, have complained bitterly that they are not being kept informed on developments in Cambodia.
 1. The Communists may be deliberately delaying the prince's return, both to prevent him from stealing the "victory" show and to allow time for the new Communist administrative apparatus to become firmly established.
 2. Two Chinese Boeing 707s flew from Peking to Phnom Penh yesterday and today, but we have no evidence that they were carrying Sihanouk and his associates.

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